



Looking over lot plans for Ibague church. A. R. Shelly is in the center.

## A TALE OF TWO CITIES

(And in between)

### Acts Alive in Colombia

Andrew R. Shelly

*"And the Word of God increased. . . ."*

*"And the number of churches multiplied. . . ."*

THINK OF THE roll call of cities in the book of Acts: Antioch, Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, Derbe, and many more.

And frequently we have references such as "and all the region round about."

Recently I listened to Bud Collier in a recording of the book of Acts in Today's English Version. What an inspiration that is!

What is Acts all about? It is the story of dedicated Christians serving under the power of the Holy Spirit! They were willing to pay the price—any price! As one listens to the first half of the book of Acts, one is simply astounded at the price the early Christians paid for the spread of the gospel. Think of Peter, Stephen, and James. "They bore in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus."

Slowly the centuries roll along. The place names are different, but the power is the same!

Not long ago dedicated Christians in Colombia were persecuted for their faith. While the dramatic aspect of the persecutions is history, a large number of Christians go on in deep dedication to Christ.

#### BOGOTA

After a visit to Bogota in 1960, I reported that the estimated population of the capital city of Colombia was one million. Now it is two million. The city has grown enormously.

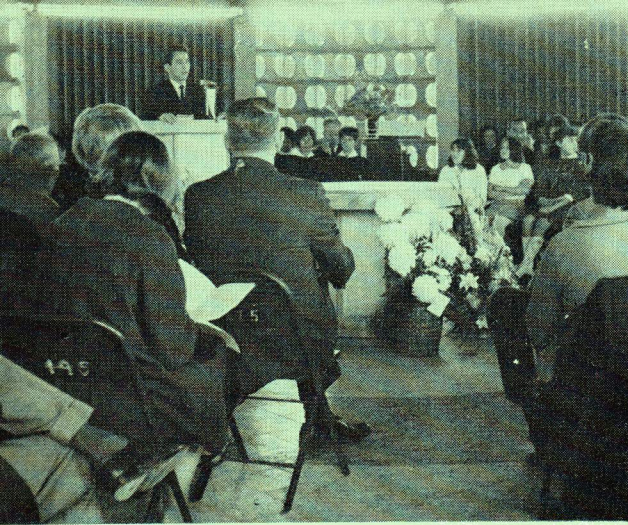
At that time it was my privilege to meet with a group of Christians in Bogota. Gerald Stucky met with the scattered Christians in Bogota once a month. The feasibility of beginning a congregation in Bogota was discussed at length, and the group was enthusiastically in favor of going forward in establishing a congregation.

Upon my return I strongly recommended that a church be started in Bogota. In discussing this matter with the Board of Missions, we concluded that an experienced pastor should be secured for the Bogota work.

It has been recognized in Colombia, and in other parts of the world, that favorable factors are converging on this city which are providing the greatest opportunities for evangelism in the history of Colombia. God has prepared a harvest!

In connection with the General Conference sessions in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1962, Howard and Marlene Habegger, then pastor of the church at Lansdale, Pennsylvania, were accepted for service in Bogota. They left for language school in Costa Rica that fall. In the fall of 1963 they went to Bogota. Services were soon begun. In May 1964 a charter service was held which formally inaugurated the new congregation. Twenty-seven individuals signed the charter document. These ranged in age from about sixteen to sixty-five years.





*Luis Correa leading the dedication service of the Bogota church.*

This young dedicated congregation immediately began a building fund. Month after month they poured money from rather meager earnings into this fund.

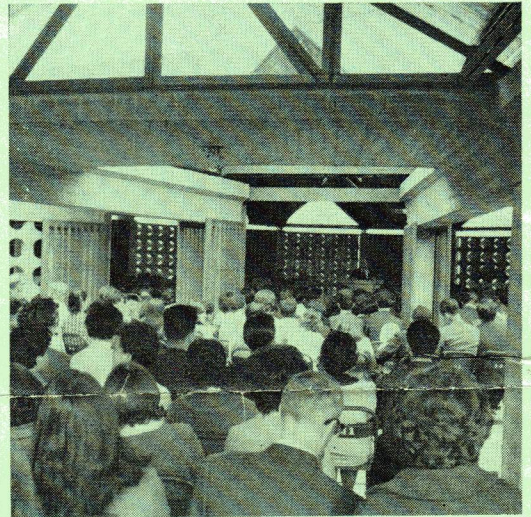
It was obvious that this congregation could not completely carry the building project needed in the city of Bogota. Consequently, Howard Habegger laid this matter before the Board of Missions in its session in December 1965. The Board of Missions agreed to assist the congregation both in the form of a grant and also a loan.

The Building Committee of the congregation began to lay plans in cooperation with the local architect. Construction was actually begun in 1966, and in the spring of 1967 the building was sufficiently completed so that a dedication service could be held on May 28, 1967.

It was my privilege to participate in the activities of the weekend of dedication. The Saturday evening service was one of deep inspiration. It was a testimony-communion service, interspersed by stanzas of hymns. Various members stood up and testified what the church of Christ meant to them. It was obvious that they were experiencing deep spiritual joy.

One of the older men, who needed to be helped to the speaker's desk, expressed his deep joy and abiding peace in the fact that the church had been established. One week later he went to be with the Lord! He had said weeks before that if he could somehow live long enough to see the completion of the church and the dedication of the church, it would be the happiest time of his life. The

*The dedication service of the Bogota church on May 28, 1967.*



Lord granted this wish.

What is the future of the Bogota congregation? To quote Adoniram Judson, we would say that "it is as bright as the promises of God." That the Lord has prepared a harvest seems to be evident. Now the Holy Spirit needs to work through the dedicated Christians in the spread of the gospel in this great city.

Although having only forty-six members, the church is already self-supporting as far as the operation of the program is concerned. They have invested heavily in the property and construction of the church. They will need to do still more in completing the church building and the parsonage facilities. Thousands of people need the witness of the gospel in Bogota. The Lord has brought this congregation into being "for such a time as this."

#### IBAGUE

As I left Ibague, I told Mrs. Armando Hernandez, "You and Armando are doing a wonderful work here." She replied in carefully spoken English, "It is not us; it is the Lord."

Although the work was begun about a year ago, I witnessed the presence of eighty-three people attending a Monday evening service, which was held in a small room on the first floor where the Armando Hernandez family lives. The children were sitting on steps. More than half the people were adults.

Where did these people come from? They





*The Bogota church and parsonage. The sanctuary is round. The parsonage is not yet completed.*

were people in the general area who needed Christ and many of whom had already accepted Him. Six new members were accepted that evening. I shook hands with an older man who had accepted Christ about six months ago. One could sense in the service the glow of new Christians in their exuberant enthusiasm for the gospel.

It often seems to me that in our historic churches we somehow miss the point! If I read the New Testament aright, I believe that instead of a "take-it-for-granted" attitude coming upon us, we ought to get more enthusiastic about the witness of the gospel. Certainly, this was true of St. Paul. In the New Testament some Christians also became lukewarm toward the gospel. However, others increased in enthusiasm as the years went by.

Armando Hernandez, Howard Habegger, and I looked over the city of Ibague from the roof of a tall downtown building. I particularly wanted to look in the direction where the conference in Colombia had decided work should be done. What a sight! Tens of thousands of people without the witness of the gospel!

The committee in Colombia did a marvelous job in selecting a site and program. They went to an area where they knew people needed Christ and started with the power of the gospel. This gospel became planted in the hearts of individual people who then formed

the nucleus of the congregation.

In this section of Ibague there are three sectors, each having about five thousand people, without any other gospel witness. There is a university nearby.

Armando Hernandez, the pastor of the congregation, and his wife Eunice both attended the seminary of the Latin American Mission in Costa Rica.

He has free time on a local widely listened to radio program. Mr. Hernandez invites people to get in touch with him through the radio station or at his home address. It was inspiring to observe a map on which he had placed tacks indicating over a hundred locations from which people had come to counsel with him.

In addition to his very aggressive visitation, counselling, and regular church work, Armando Hernandez is a part time teacher at the Christian Normal School of which Hector Valencia is the director.

One of the main purposes of my visit to Ibague was to review the proposals in regard to a church building. Something must be done. Eighty-three people cannot worship adequately and attend Sunday school classes in a building such as they now have. The Armando Hernandez family occupies the second and third floors of the building. The first floor and the roof are used for Sunday school purposes. The rent is quite high. If a site can be secured soon, the Hernandezes feel that they could

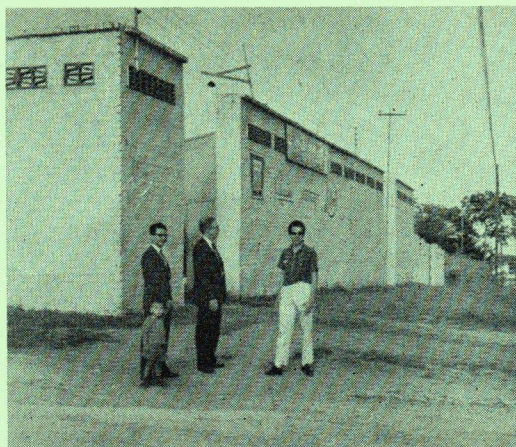




*Mennonite students at Christian Normal School, Ibagué, Colombia. Front row: Dr. and Mrs. Hector Valencia to the right. Back row: Armando Hernandez to the left and Howard Habegger to the right.*

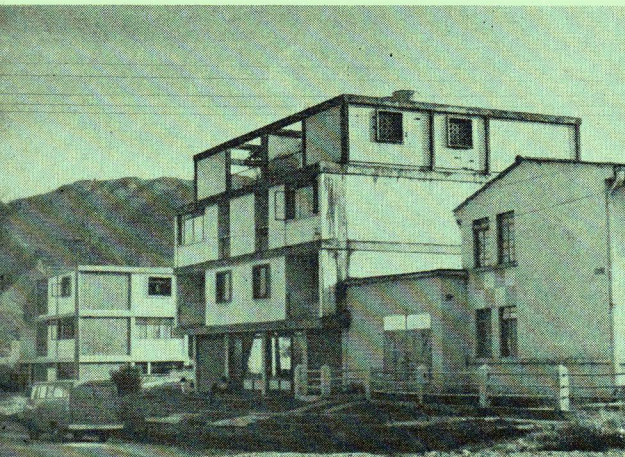


*Pastor Armando Hernandez and his wife Eunice of Ibagué.*



*Suggested site for location of Ibagué church. The walls would facilitate completion of a section where the group could begin worshiping at once.*

*Ibagué group now worships in right section of tall building. This building also serves as the home for Pastor Hernandez and family.*



live in another house where the rent would be lower.

Fortunately a desirable site is for sale only about four blocks away. It is on a main thoroughfare, has very frequent bus service, and is located in an area where there are no other churches. We visited the pastor of the Christian Missionary Alliance Church fifteen blocks away.

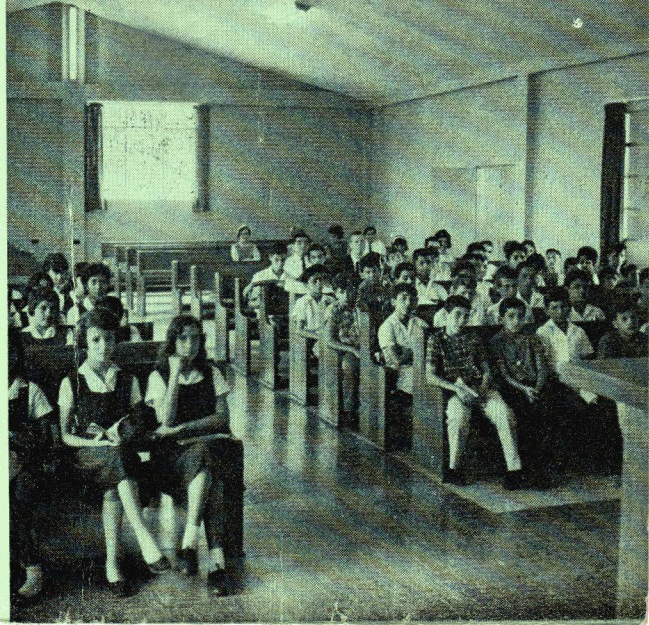
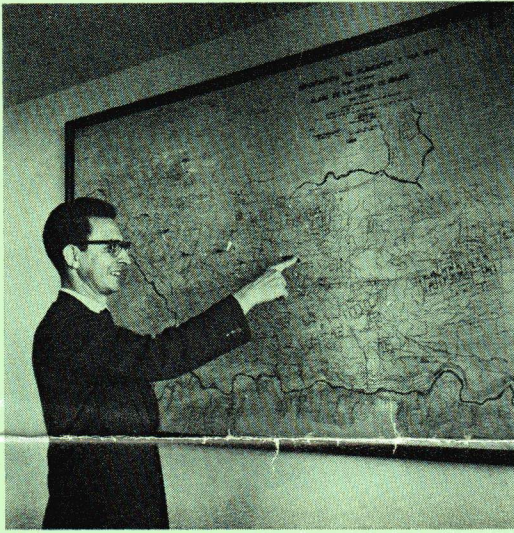
Establishment of the church in Ibagué is a challenge to the leading of the Holy Spirit. First, Armando and Eunice Hernandez, dedicated Christians, have spent literally dozens of hours studying the city of Ibagué in regard to Christian witness. Second, Armando Hernandez worked through a committee of the local Christians in discussing the challenge of a church building. Here the Lord has worked marvelously. A young man, who recently became a Christian, is strongly dedicated to the service of the Lord. He is acquainted with the leading citizens of Ibagué and knows the owner of the property. He told me that he believed the Lord brought him to this point for just this time.

Third, the work is discussed at regular meetings of the church conference of Colombia. Although there is missionary representation on this church executive committee, it is autonomous. Next thrusts of witness are discussed. The church conference is convinced that we need to enlarge the work in Ibagué.

Fourth, the North American brotherhood



*Armando Hernandez with a map of Ibague.*



*Student body of secondary and normal school at Ibague.*

comes into the picture. The Christians in any particular location in Colombia are few in number, and their income is very low. In considering a challenge like Ibague, we need to transcend geographical limitations. The Ibague congregation will not need a large grant in order to launch the work, but they will need a loan which can be repaid over a period of a number of years. The site already has a wall around the property, and constructing a simple roof would enable the congregation to start using their property at once. This would give them a center for growth.

It is my conviction that perhaps the greatest single challenge facing us today is to clearly discern where the Lord is opening harvest fields and the extent to which He wants us to go through the doors and reap that harvest with Him. We can apply basic principles of evaluation to situations like this. The key may be a willingness to understand where the challenges are.

What is the future of the gospel in Ibague? Again I quote Adoniram Judson, "It is as bright as the promises of God."

#### *In Between*

As important as city ministries are, the Bible still insists that the challenge is "every creature." Acts 1:8 refers to the city of Jerusalem and also "in all Judea"; it refers to "Samaria" and "unto the uttermost part of the earth." St. Paul's missionary journeys took

him to cities and the "region about."

The church through the centuries has always made the greatest progress when they followed through on a balanced, aggressive, Holy Spirit led and empowered ministry. It has been so easy to follow popular "fads." The spread of the gospel in the New Testament church was amazing. The witness was a balanced one. This made for progress.

Thus, as important as the work in Bogota to the east and Ibague to the west is, we must also consider the region in between.

#### TOCAIMA

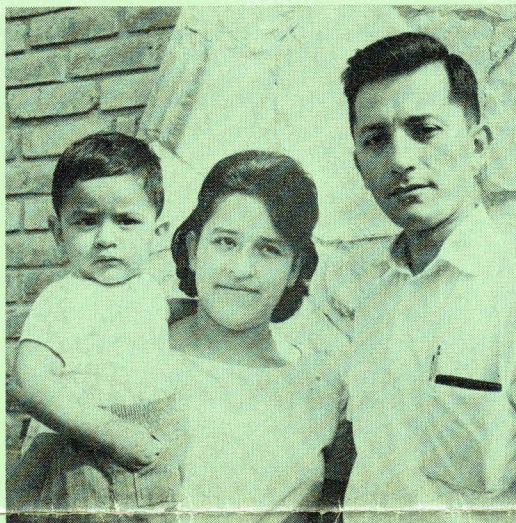
Tocaima is located in a very hot climate. There is some gospel witness in Tocaima, but it is very meager and splintered.

At a recent church conference the question of Tocaima was discussed. Does the Lord want us to work in Tocaima? Juan Garzon felt called of the Lord to work in Tocaima, and the church conference appointed him to serve there for a two-year period.

It was my joy to visit Juan Garzon in Tocaima. Tocaima does not represent a glowing success story. The work is obviously difficult. Yet, Juan Garzon reports that he has complete freedom to witness.

How long should the church stay in Tocaima? Juan Garzon still has well over a year in this trial period. The church conference sponsors the work although our Board of Missions subsidizes it.





*Pastor and Mrs. James Caro and son of LaMesa Church.*

### LA MESA

This work in the Andes Mountains is inspiring. A new church built in a spirit of partnership was completed in 1963.

In 1961 when I visited the congregation, we discussed the construction of the church building. I asked them whether they would see their way clear to build a church if they were given a \$500 grant and a \$1,500 loan, repayable in ten years. I shall never forget the response of one man when he said, "This would mean a very great sacrifice, but we are willing to do it."

In 1964 it was my privilege to preach in this church. It is a lovely building, costing about \$2,600 in total.

The Rev. and Mrs. James Caro have served the church for six years. The congregation is dedicated to the Lord.

Our missionaries Janet Soldner and Julia Schutz live in La Mesa where sixty-six children attend the mission school. Colombia needs schools. If every high school graduate in Colombia would become a schoolteacher, it would take twenty years until every child would have the privilege of going to school. How does one evaluate opportunities and responsibilities.

### CACHIPAY

In 1940 W. C. Voth and Gerald Stucky recommended that we start a school particularly for children of leprosy parents.

The school is continuing although the board-



*Teachers at Cachipay school.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Dyck of Paraguay. Jacob Dyck serves as pastor of Cachipay Church.*

ing aspect has been eliminated temporarily. All but two of the teachers are Colombian.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Cachipay work has been the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Dyck from Paraguay, former students of the seminary in Montevideo. They are in Cachipay for a two-year assignment. This has been a result of a partnership sharing. The cost of their travel to Colombia was paid by the Board of Missions, and the church in Colombia takes care of their stay in that country. Although they had been in the area for only two weeks, they were adjusting well and are thrilled with the work.

With the coming of Peter Harder, agricultural ministries were expanded. Peter has a burden for the welfare of the community outside of Cachipay. He discovered that there were good prospects for farmers if they could be organized effectively and could market their



crops cooperatively. Bogota has an unlimited market for oranges and vegetables. He has been meeting with the farmers to discuss possibilities of working together for the common good of all.

The result of this cooperation has been a better system of marketing oranges at double the price. Through organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation it has been possible to secure technical advice and free seeds. Farmers have been growing coffee almost exclusively. However, it has become necessary to diversify their interests.

Beyond the immediate benefits in strengthening the church through a stable community, this has given Peter Harder and others an excellent opportunity for fellowship with the people of the area. Another project is the improvement of the road to Cachipay which will be a tremendous help to the total community.

Cachipay continues to be a great challenge in this area of the Andes Mountains.

#### ANOLAIMA

George and Margaret Ediger serve in Anolaima. Economically the people are poor. Their average wage is about \$1.20 per day. The rate of their giving astounded me. Many give a minimum of a tithe. Dedicated to the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His church, they seem to be living in the book of Acts.

Cooperative partnership is in progress. A \$1,500 loan to the Anolaima church repayable over a ten-year period has been approved by both the Board of Missions and Church Extension Services, Incorporated. The Board of Missions has approved a \$2,000 grant. They will need to provide the rest of the money in order to construct the first phase of a building program.

It is hoped that this building program will begin late this summer or early fall. This will be a great blessing to the people of Anolaima.

Anolaima serves a 20,000 population area. What a challenge!

#### CONCLUSION

I would like to list some sweeping conclusions:

1. I visited the Mennonite Brethren work in Cali where I stayed with the Ernest Friesen family. Cali is said to be the fastest growing city in the entire world. It is now pushing toward the one million mark. One evening the Ernest Friesen family, with another family, and I discussed the work in Cali.



*Missionary group in Colombia. Front row: Howard Habegger, George Ediger, and Peter Harder. Second row: Janet Soldner, Bertha Mae Reiff, Marlene Habegger, Vernelle Yoder, Margaret Ediger, Claire Harder, and Julia Schutz. Glendon Klaassens are on furlough.*

The early Sunday morning tour of the Mennonite Brethren area was simply a "baptism of inspiration." In one area I saw a recently constructed church. The local people purchased the land, and the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions paid for the building. It cost \$7,000. A marvelous investment!

Ernest Friesen told me that many cities were going up along the coastline of Colombia and indicated the number of churches in each city. It was astounding as he would say, "This particular city has 150,000 people and there are two churches." In some cases he would refer to cities of thirty, fifty, seventy-five thousand people where there is no church.

The Mennonite Brethren are doing a wonderful work in and around Cali.

2. Voluntary service and short-term workers were visited in Bogota and Cali. It is too early to assess the program which is still experiencing growing pains.

Much has been learned in a short time, and many lessons can be applied to Colombia. Short-term service is here to stay. I was impressed with the caliber of the young people who have gone to Colombia. I was also impressed by the synchronization of the focus of purpose in regard to the total work.

3. 1968—a decisive year for Colombia—will be used for a coordinated evangelism-in-depth program. It was my privilege to meet one of the leaders of the evangelism-in-depth movement in Costa Rica. He informed me that they were in touch with forty countries.





I have sometimes wondered whether the Lord has brought this particular movement, with perhaps a few others, to the surface in our generation in order to accelerate this obvious task of making the gospel available to the world.

The very basic purpose of evangelism-in-depth is to mobilize the total church in a well-rounded ministry. In Colombia, besides a small financial involvement, each mission and church group is to secure a worker for the evangelism-in-depth program for a year.

4. The growth of the churches. During the persecution years the evangelical church in Colombia grew faster proportionately than any other church in the world. It is a thrill to visit Colombia and observe the growth of the church by people who have been recently converted. Although exact figures are not available, it is estimated that our church has grown forty-six percent in one year's time and probably was second only to the Pentecostal group. Dr. James Goff, Presbyterian missionary, is doing a study of the church growth in Colombia.

5. Church buildings and national leaders. Other mission groups in Colombia have been astounded at the number of church buildings and national and mature leaders we have in Colombia.

6. The key role of inspiration and motivation. Perhaps this is the crucial ministry for Christian missions today. Inspiration and motivation begin with the sharing of the pure gospel. As an individual accepts the Lord Jesus Christ, he becomes a new creature.

In Colombia, agriculture and free seeds are

available, but people need to be inspired and motivated to use them. To share this spark of inspiration is one of the patient ministries necessary in our day.

7. The marvelous spirit of unity among Christian groups. In Colombia a seminary similar to Union Biblical Seminary at Yeotmal, India, is being developed. I am very enthusiastic about the prospects of the future of the united seminary. Next year, Pastor Caro from La Mesa plans to be a student at this seminary. The church conference will sponsor his going.

8. The need to apply multiplier factors to the work. We should be careful not to enter into a "fad." However, much of the future thrust will need to be multiplier factors. Thus, a work like the Christian Normal School, Ibagu, and the seminary in Medellin become very important. Christian teachers are needed very urgently in Colombia.

9. The meaning of aggressive biblical partnership today. It only takes about three and one-half hours to fly from the United States to the capital city of Bogota. It is possible to leave Wichita, Kansas, in the morning and arrive at our mission areas by evening.

I marvel at the world view which the early church had. I can not fathom their understanding of the task apart from the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. We in our day are catching up with the Bible. We are gradually coming to see that to be oriented to one geographical area has never been God's pattern. In our feverish desire to do all we can for our own areas, we have lacked the vital spark. It is true that the church that is about the Lord's business also prospers spiritually at its highest point at home.

I believe we must look upon our world as God sees it. Thus, even the task of missions must be the will of God. This must be supreme.

What do we say in regard to a city of two million people with only twenty-five to thirty Protestant churches? Many of these are very small. What do we say in regard to large cities—like Ibagu and Cali—where whole areas of the city are totally without Christian witness? How does God see these cities in comparison to cities in North America?

How does God evaluate resources? Can we come to the place where as God's people we honestly seek His guidance in the use of His resources (worldwide) for His will and in His way? While we will never come to perfection, as we use the key of willingness, it is amazing how far we can go.